

Developing a Regional Rail Strategy for the Western Balkans

Facts and figures

*The length of Core TEN-T rail network is **2602 km** while the Comprehensive network amounts to **3857 km**.*

*The average speed in operation **50 km/h (>100 in EU MS)***

Only 47% of rail Core Network in Western Balkans is in compliance with TEN-T standards. (> 80% in EU MS)

EUR 2 billion were invested in rail infrastructure in the region in the last 10 years while traffic dropped by 60% (passengers) and 15% (freight) during the same period.

Developing a **regional strategy** is the only credible solution to revitalise rail in the region.

The aim is to align the rail legislation of the WB6 with the EU one and coordinate policies and investments in region.

A regional strategy will help creating a single rail area for WB6 with a view to facilitate the integration into the EU Rail market.

Rail transport in the Western Balkans has been recognised as one of the priorities in the Connectivity Agenda.

The adoption of a Regional Rail Strategy will be a step towards the establishment of a common rail market.

However, the situation of the overall rail system and networks in Western Balkans – including the TEN-T Core and Comprehensive ones - is far from being satisfactory. Transport volumes for both passengers and freight have had an overall negative trend in the last ten years, while investments in infrastructure during the same period amounted to around EUR 2 billion. Reforms did not take place in parallel and therefore, the investments made in the infrastructure did not benefit from a better governance of the rail system.

In December 2018, the Ministers of Transport of the Western Balkans endorsed a declaration on Regional Rail Strategy. The objective is to develop a comprehensive action plan to revitalise the rail system in the region and bring it closer to EU standards, in line with the Transport Community's objectives.

The Regional Rail Strategy focuses on priorities aiming at inverting the current rail traffic trends: rail market opening, development of rail freight corridors, improvement of the maintenance and, last but not least, the alignment of the rail legislation on interoperability with the EU legislation.

The Permanent Secretariat of the Transport Community developed, with the support of the recently created Technical Committee for Rail, a first set of actions for developing a Regional Rail Strategy in the Western Balkans. The set of actions covers three areas: Rail market opening, Governance of the rail system and Interoperability.

Expected benefits:

The lack of competitive rail transport services in the Western Balkans is a major obstacle to achieving sustainable transport of passengers and goods, as well as to enhancing connectivity within the region. The institutional framework is a key element to ensure non-discriminatory



and transparent access to the rail infrastructure for all interested parties.

A regular consultation on progress in achieving institutional reforms and restructuring of rail sector will be established at regional level in view of promoting a sustainable rail system.

The Western Balkan is a small transport market and even a smaller rail one. Without a strong coordination of policies and investments, none of the parties to the Treaty could revitalise its rail market alone. Interoperability and safety issues are key elements in providing legal base for regional cooperation. In this context, the mutual recognition of operating licenses, train driver licenses, safety certificates, vehicle authorisation is a precondition for rail market opening at regional level.

Interoperability measures, in line with EU Regulations represent the backbone of the action to ensure cross border traffic without unnecessary delay. In addition, the Transport Community will set up a multi-annual maintenance "Transport Facilitation action plan" in order to improve the sustainability of the rail infrastructure in region.

The overall regional rail strategy, when implemented, will bring not only benefits in terms of connectivity within the Western Balkan region and with Member States, it will also bring benefits in terms of competitiveness of rail versus other modes, through the provision of more reliable, safer and cost-effective transport operations.

1st set of actions for developing a regional rail strategy in the Western Balkans

1. Market opening

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| Amend national law to remove potential breaches of TCT provisions in regard to opening up the market at national level (phase 1) |
| Establish functioning institutions (regulatory body, licensing body, national safety authority, national investigation body, designated body) – including legal, administrative, and budgetary actions |
| Publish Network Statement for railway infrastructure |
| Publish Network Statement for service facilities (sea and river ports, terminals) |
| Take legislative and/or regulatory measures to achieve mutual recognition at regional level of: operating licenses, train driver licenses, safety certificates, vehicle authorisation |

2. Governance

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| Create a network of EU DEL rail correspondents in the region to assist in the implementation and monitoring of the TCT Rail Action Plan |
| Organise stakeholder workshop on the streamlining of technical assistance and financing of the reform of the rail sector and rail infrastructure projects in the Western Balkans (ERA, S2R, WB, EIB, EBRD, EU DELs, DG MOVE, DG NEAR, CONNECTA, EU MS...) |

3. Interoperability

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| Transpose and implement the Interoperability Directive 2008/57/EC (valid until June 2020) and its new version Directive (EU) 2016/797 (4th railway package) |
| Transpose and implement all EU Technical Specifications for Interoperability |
| Prepare a detailed plan for the review and cleaning up of national rail technical and safety rules in line with the EU rail acquis and the prerogatives of ERA |
| Establish an electronic register of vehicles, taking into account the OTIF National Vehicle Registers specifications 'NVR 2015' and the European Centralised Virtual Vehicle Register (ECVVR) |
| Establish an electronic register and management system of railway infrastructure, taking into account the existence of the European Registers of Infrastructure (RINF) |
| Adoption of five-year Maintenance Plan |